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SUBJECT: BELGRADE FEIGNS OPTIMISIM AFTER DIRECT TALKS

Summary

11. (SBU) Serbian leaders returned from the September 28 Kosovo talks in New York boasting confidence in Serbia's Kosovo strategy and hopeful that the talks could produce an agreement. The Foreign Minister told the Ambassador privately on October 1 that he believed the Troika was receptive to President Tadic's concept of a "common sovereign home" for Belgrade and Kosovo. Post will continue to meet with government leaders and negotiators to ensure reasonable expectations. End Summary.

Tadic Optimism

12. (SBU) Returning to Belgrade, following the first face-to-face meeting in the current round of Troika-facilitated Kosovo talks in New York, September 28, Serbia's lead negotiators told the public that they were more optimistic about success of Serbia's Kosovo policy. Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic told the Ambassador on October 1 that the Belgrade-Pristina talks in New York had gone well mainly because of the tone President Tadic had expressed in his intervention. Asked about the tone of Prime Minister Kostunica, Jeremic was mildly critical, saying Kostunica "always saw the glass half empty," Jeremic emphasized, however, that Tadic's Democratic Party (DS) and Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) were united in their approach to Kosovo, despite clear differences in their long-term visions for Serbia. Jeremic, saying he reflected the President's views, said he thought there was a real chance for a negotiated settlement with Pristina.

13. (SBU) Jeremic said he believed the Troika, especially Ischinger, was receptive to Tadic's concept of a "common sovereign home" for Serbs and Kosovars, and that the Serbs believed Ischinger would work hard before the mid-October meetings in Brussels to give that concept some meaning. The Troika, Jeremic said, had a mandate to be more forward leaning and advance new ideas and solutions. The Ambassador noted that he had seen nothing of such a new Troika mandate in the two written statements that came from the session, but Jeremic said it was his "impression" that this was the case. Jeremic believed that he and Samardzic would lead the Serbian delegation at Brussels.

Realism

14. (SBU) MFA Political Director Borislav Stefanovic lacked his leaders' optimism about reaching an agreement with Kosovo's Unity Team. Stefanovic told poloff, October 4, that the notion of "common sovereignty" offered considerable authority to the Kosovars, but it did not bridge the gap between independence and autonomy. In response to poloff's urging that Serbia introduce the gap-filling proposal as soon as possible, Stefanovic said he did not expect Serbia to put a proposal on the table that the Kosovo could accept. Echoing Jeremic, Stefanovic said that "if Serbia were able to accept such a proposal," it would have to come from the Troika -- and "Serbia is not able."

Serb Negotiators Define Progress: Delay

15. (SBU) In a joint broadcast with Jeremic on RTS state television on October 3, Kosovo Minister Slobodan Samardzic said Serbia's "common Kosovo policy...[had] achieved results in New York" and suggested that the tone of the talks had improved. Samardzic added that Belgrade could be optimistic, because the GOS request had successfully extended the Kosovo status talks past the summer of 2007, implying that they could do so again.

... and Avoiding Regional Precedent

16. (SBU) The two ministers warned of the regional implications of a Kosovo unilateral declaration of independence. Also on RTS on October 3, Samardzic called national borders "the most sensitive issue" in the Balkans and said that any change in borders "even as part of oral agreements" would create a negative precedent for "other ethnic disputes." Jeremic assured that Serbia sought only to protect its territorial integrity, and did "not offer Albanians, and they are not interested in, reintegration of Kosovo in Serbia." Jeremic explained that Serbia offered Kosovo the "widest possible autonomy... keep[ing] some attributes of sovereignty for us."

Comment

17. (SBU) Kostunica and Tadic are united on Kosovo policy and both plan to show in December that the Troika talks, particularly the direct engagement with Pristina, were a good idea and productive. They will market this point of view in particular to the Europeans as rationale for more talks, pointing to progress as proof that more talks are needed. This is unhelpful, and Post will try to point the

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Serbs in a different direction and persuade them that, if there are new Serbian ideas, the earlier they are shared the better. Any last minute proposals only will be met with cynicism and the Serbs, EU, and Russians should be assured of that. End Comment.

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